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## Grand Valley State 21 Northwest 17



PHOTO BY MIKE DYE / PHOTO EDITOR

# A TALE OF 2 HALVES

Bearcats bid for third national title comes up four yards short, ending improbable run

By Brendan Kelley  
 Assistant Sports Editor

With one second left on the clock Northwest senior quarterback Josh Lamberson stepped behind his center Jordan Wilcox and prepared to make the last play of his collegiate career. The scoreboard in the background clearly showed what Bearcat fans didn't want to see. The 'Cats trailed Grand Valley State 21-17.

Lamberson was flushed from the pocket and as he glanced across the field he caught a glimpse of Raphael Robinson

standing alone in the corner of the end zone. The 'Cats quarterback threw a pass towards Robinson, but the ball fell short of the goal line forcing Robinson to run from his position in the corner of the end zone to the four-yard line to receive the pass. The hero from last week's semifinal game attempted to fight free of the three defenders weighing him down.

In an instant the redshirt freshman fell to the ground and the championship dreams of Bearcat players, coaches and fans came to an end.

Robinson and E.J. Falkner lied motionless on the turf as tears fell from their

eyes. The scoreboard in the background told the story of heartbreak and a season that ended just shy of a fairy tale.

"I thought I put enough on that pass, but obviously I didn't," Lamberson said. "Raph still made a nice catch on it though."

Northwest held onto a three-point lead until Grand Valley found the end zone with 4:25 left in the game on a 35-yard touchdown pass from Finnerty to Brandon Langston. The extra point kick by Scott Greene

see **TALE** on **A2**

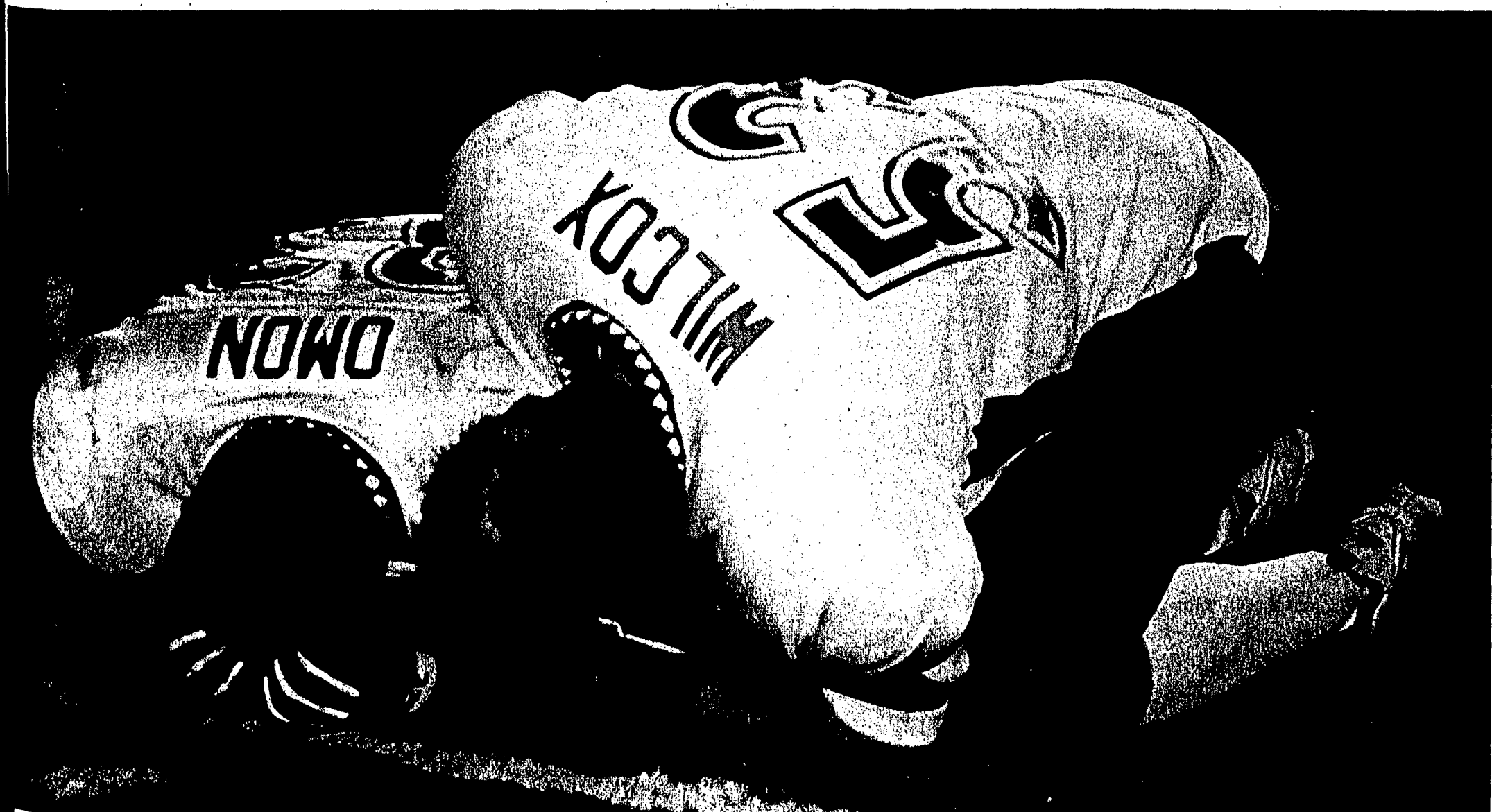




PHOTO BY MIKE DYE / PHOTO EDITOR

OP: MIKE PETERSON struggles to get every yard in the second half of the National Championship game against Grand Valley State. Peterson gained 61 yards on this play in the third quarter, which is the longest play that the Laker's defense allowed this season. ABOVE: JORDAN WILCOX consoles running back Xavier Omon minutes after the loss to the Lakers.

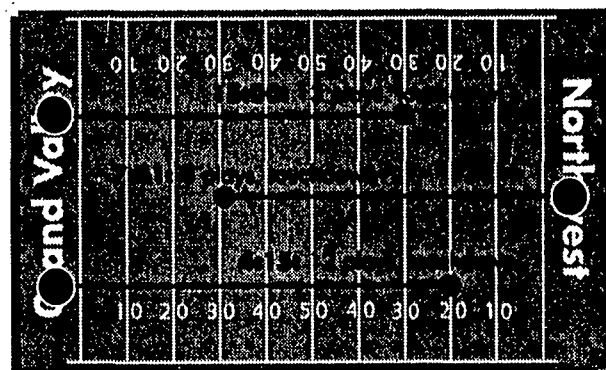
 7 7 0 3—17

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### THE SCORING DRIVES

→ Net yards from scrimmage  
● Punt distance

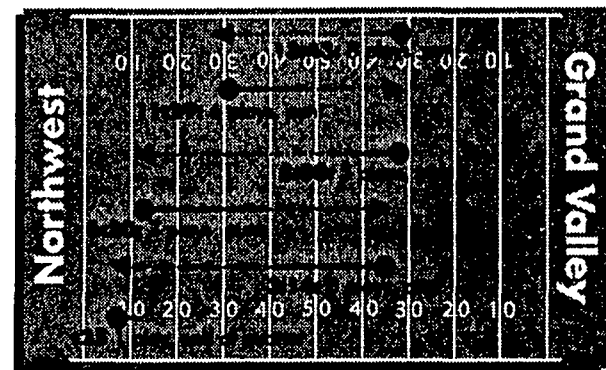
#### First Quarter



GRAND VALLEY 7

NORTHWEST 7

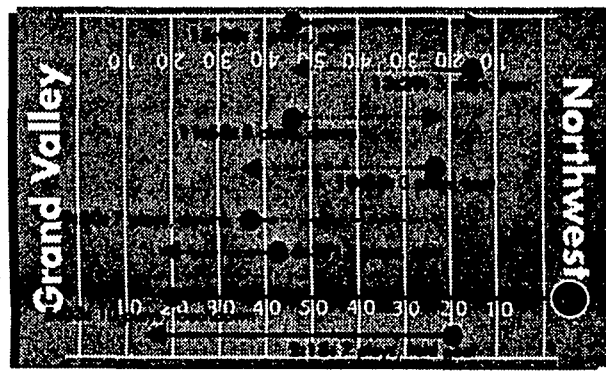
#### Second Quarter



NORTHWEST 14

GRAND VALLEY 7

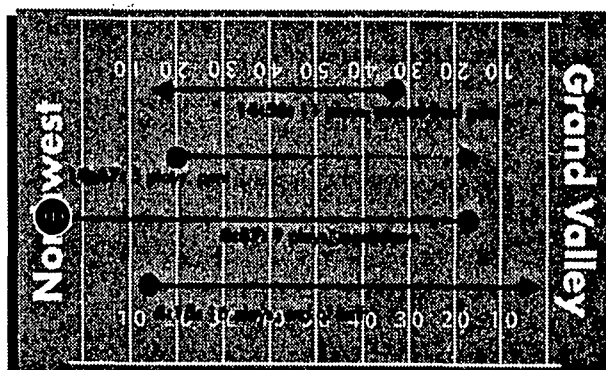
#### Third Quarter



GRAND VALLEY 14

NORTHWEST 14

#### Fourth Quarter



NORTHWEST 14

GRAND VALLEY 21

### CHAMPIONSHIP STATS

Northwest		Grand Valley
20	first downs	16
24	rushing attempts	42
96	yards gained rushing	183
42	yards lost rushing	18
54	net yards rushing	165
326	net yards passing	172
75	total offensive plays	61
380	total net yards	337
0-0	fumbles: number-lost	0-0
1-6	penalties: number-yards	3-15
6-203	number of punts-yards	5-201
2-26	punt returns: number-yards	2-16
4-72	kickoff returns	4-107
0-0	interceptions: number-yards	0-0
32:21	time of possession	27:39
8 of 19	third-down conversions	6 of 13

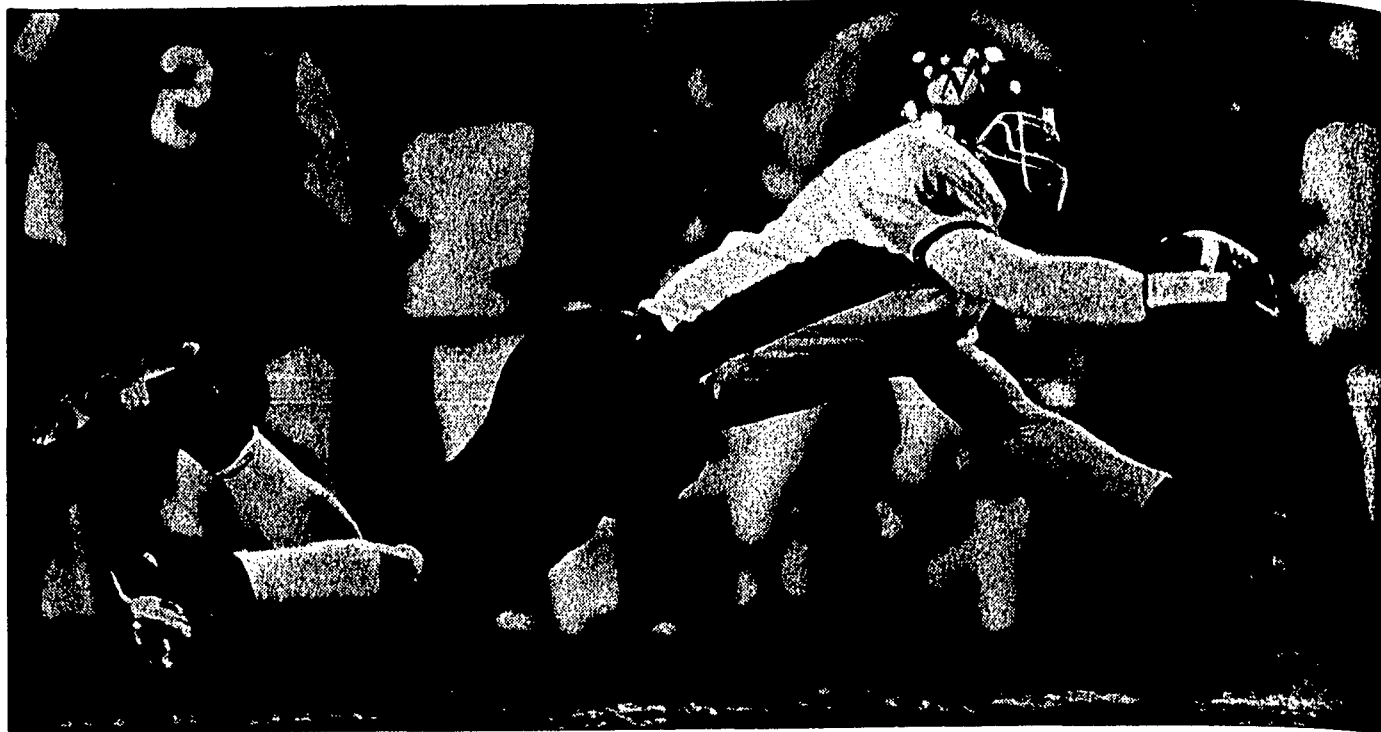


PHOTO BY MIKE DYE / PHOTO EDITOR

**BEARCAT SENIOR ANDRE RECTOR** drops the pass by Josh Lamberson in the fourth quarter. It was ruled incomplete after the ball hit the ground and popped out of his hands.

## TALE: Bearcats fall 4 yards short of National Championship

continued from A1

brought the score to its final resting place at 21-17.

"They ran the ball well and only threw it 19 times," senior Dave Tollefson said. "Because of that it was hard to get a rhythm."

Northwest took over on their own 15-yard line with 4:15 left in the game. The 'Cats drove down the field using passes from Lamberson to Peterson and Andre Rector to get to the Grand Valley 17-yard line. On second down from the 17, Falkner bobbled a clean pass from Lamberson in the end zone and fell out of bounds.

Lamberson then was pushed out of bounds for a five-yard loss with one second remaining to set up the final play.

The 'Cats scored on their opening drive of the game when Lamberson hooked up with tight end Mike Peterson

on a 30-yard strike.

Peterson ended the night with a career-high nine catches for 150 yards and one touchdown. He also became the 10th player in Championship history to finish with 100 yards or more receiving.

"Coming in I knew I had to take advantage of every opportunity I got," Peterson said.

With 4:15 left in the first quarter Grand Valley answered the Northwest scoring drive with one of their own when quarterback Cullen Finnerty scrambled into the end zone.

Xavier Omon capped off a 12-play, 80-yard drive with a two-yard touchdown run with 13:43 remaining in the second quarter. The Omon touchdown was the only score of the second quarter and the 'Cats went into halftime leading 14-7.

The third quarter appeared to be a completely different ballgame than the previous two quarters as both teams went

scoreless until the Lakers struck with 2:15 left in the third quarter on another Finnerty touchdown run from three yards out.

The 'Cats took back control of the game with 14:56 left in the fourth quarter on a 35-yard field goal by Tommy Frevert.

Lamberson set a championship record for passes completed and attempted by completing 33 of 49 passes for 326 yards and one touchdown.

"I was very confident. Our backs have been against the wall all year and we've responded," Lamberson said. "We were confident of our ability to run the two minute offense."

Coach Mel Tjeerdsma echoed Lamberson's comments about his team that bounced back from injuries, deficits and other struggles throughout the year.

"I believed we would win because of the guys on our sideline and the heart and character of our team," he said. "I didn't

stop believing until the final play was done."

In the post-game press conference seated next to his coach and teammates Lamberson spoke of the character of those around him and his last season as a Bearcat.

"It was unbelievable," he said. "You can't have a better group of guys or coaches in your corner. Whenever we had our backs against the wall we always had someone step up and say this isn't going to beat us."

When asked what he said to his team after their season just short of the national championship Tjeerdsma sighed and said:

"That's the way the game is. That's the way life is. Sometimes life doesn't break your way. All season we've told our kids that if you give your best effort you don't have to look at the scoreboard. I think they gave their best effort tonight."

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# Omon held to 2 carries in half

After big first half, Lakers make changes

By Jerome Boettcher  
Sports Editor

As time ran out in the national championship, running back Xavier Omon threw down his helmet, fell down to his knees and burst into tears on the Northwest sideline.

The single-season rushing record holder watched for the majority of the last drive that fell short and for most of the second half. After a first half of 10 carries for 61 yards, including a 31-yard burst, Omon disappeared. The sophomore only touched the ball three times in the second half—none in the fourth quarter.

"A lot of that's dictated by field position, a lot of that's dictated by the score of the game," Northwest coach Mel Tjeerdsma said. "... (Not running Omon) certainly wasn't part of the plan. We really wanted to run the football but on the other hand we weren't really running it effectively—at least in the second half."

The Bearcats ended up with only 54 total rushing yards compared to Grand Valley's 165 yards on the ground.

"It's hard for us to get in a flow if we can't effectively run the ball. We knew rushing yards were going to be tough to come by against Grand Valley," quarterback Josh Lamberson said. "They do a great job of putting people in the box and putting themselves in position to make plays."

Omon finished his sophomore season with 1,643 all-purpose yards including 16 touchdowns, while he averag-

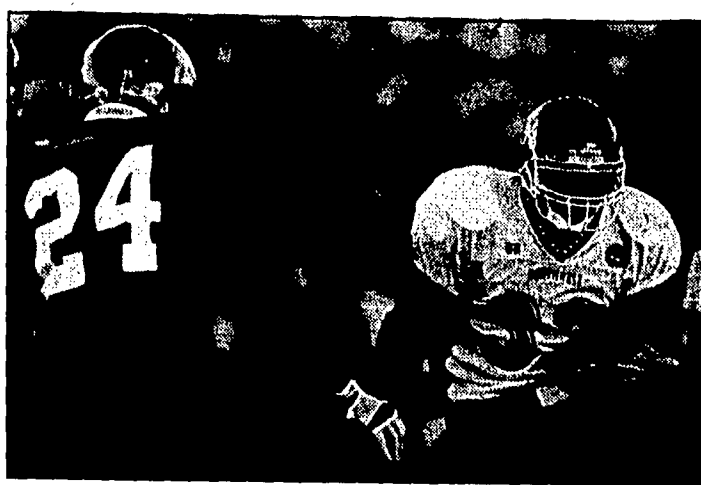


PHOTO BY MIKE DYE / PHOTO EDITOR

**BEARCAT RUNNINGBACK XAVIER Omon looks Lakers defensive back Brandon Carr in the eyes as he attempts to score in the second quarter of the championship game. Omon ran 13 times during the game averaging 4.8 yards per carry.**

ing 117 yards per game. Third time is a charm

Northwest converted three times on third down on its opening drive and once on fourth down. Grand Valley, on the other hand, didn't convert a third down until midway through the third quarter. They then converted on their next two out of three third downs with pass plays of 14 and 33 that eventually led to a touchdown to tie the game at 14-14.

"We just didn't execute like we should've at times and that was the difference in the game," Tjeerdsma said.

Grand Valley converted six out of 13 times on third down in the game and failed on its only fourth down attempt. Northwest converted eight of 19 times on third down and converted on all four of its fourth down attempts. The last fourth down came when quarterback Josh Lamberson hooked up with Raphael Robinson for 18 yards, but Robinson was four yards short of the ultimate goal—the game winning touchdown.

Penalties not a plenty

At one point this season,

Northwest was averaging more than 90 yards in penalties per game. Going into Saturday's game they had lowered their average to 73 yards per game. However, on Saturday they had a season low—Northwest was penalized once for a loss of six yards on a delay of game. It actually was one more than the normal five yards for the penalty.

Both teams set a championship game record for the fewest amount penalties with just four for 21 yards. Though there might have been some questionable no-calls, Tjeerdsma liked the fact that there were very few penalties.

"I like it when there are no penalties, let us play," he said. "... That's what you look for in a national championship game, that type of game, let the kids play, let the kids decide it."

Rector to the Cactus Bowl

Andre Rector was selected to play in the 2006 Division II Football Cactus Bowl. The game will be played Jan. 6, 2006 at 6:35 p.m. in Kingsville, Tex.

## SEASONSTATS

### RUSHING

1. Xavier Omon	1,643 yds.
2. Mitch Herring	231
3. Brant Gregg	50
4. E.J. Falkner	27
5. Kendall Wrigh	616

### RECEIVING

1. Andre Rector	1,297 yds.
2. Mike Peterson	614
3. Wright	518
4. Falkner	486
5. J. Meyerkorth	266

### PASSING

1. Josh Lamberson	3,766 yds.
2. Josh Mathews	77 yds.
3. Joel Osborn	58 yds.

### PUNT RETURN

1. Wright	269 yds.
2. Rector	53
3. Zach Chambers	23
4. Tyler Martin	13
5. Dave Tollefson	7

# Coordinator takes head coaching job

By Jerome Boettcher  
Sports Editor

Missouri Southern State University announced the hiring of Northwest offensive coordinator Bart Tatum as its football coach Tuesday afternoon.

"I've waited for the right situation for myself and my family and we think this it," Tatum said in a press conference Tuesday at Southern.

Tatum takes the position after spending 12 years at Northwest. For the first eight seasons he was the offensive

line coach, then was promoted to assistant head coach before the 2002 season. After former coordinator Jim Svoboda left in 2003 to become UCLA's quarterback's coach, Tatum took over the play-calling duties.

Tatum is just the third coach to leave in the Tjeerdsma's 12 year tenure.

The vacancy opened after former coach John Ware died of an apparent heart attack in Joplin on Sept. 27.

No decision has been made on who will replace Tatum.



Bart Tatum

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# Peterson has career day in Florence

Tight end makes transition from working class to national stage

By Cole Young  
Editor in Chief

Mike Peterson exited the Northwest locker room at Braly Stadium looking like a man that had just left the office after a long day at work.

The 6-foot-3-inch tight end had a duffle bag thrown over one shoulder and his trademark gallon jug of water in the other.

Judging by the business-like look on Peterson's face, it would have been hard to tell he had just recorded a career day—in the national championship.

The junior from Atlantic, Iowa had just pulled in nine receptions for 150 yards, in front of more than 6,000 fans and millions more on ESPN.

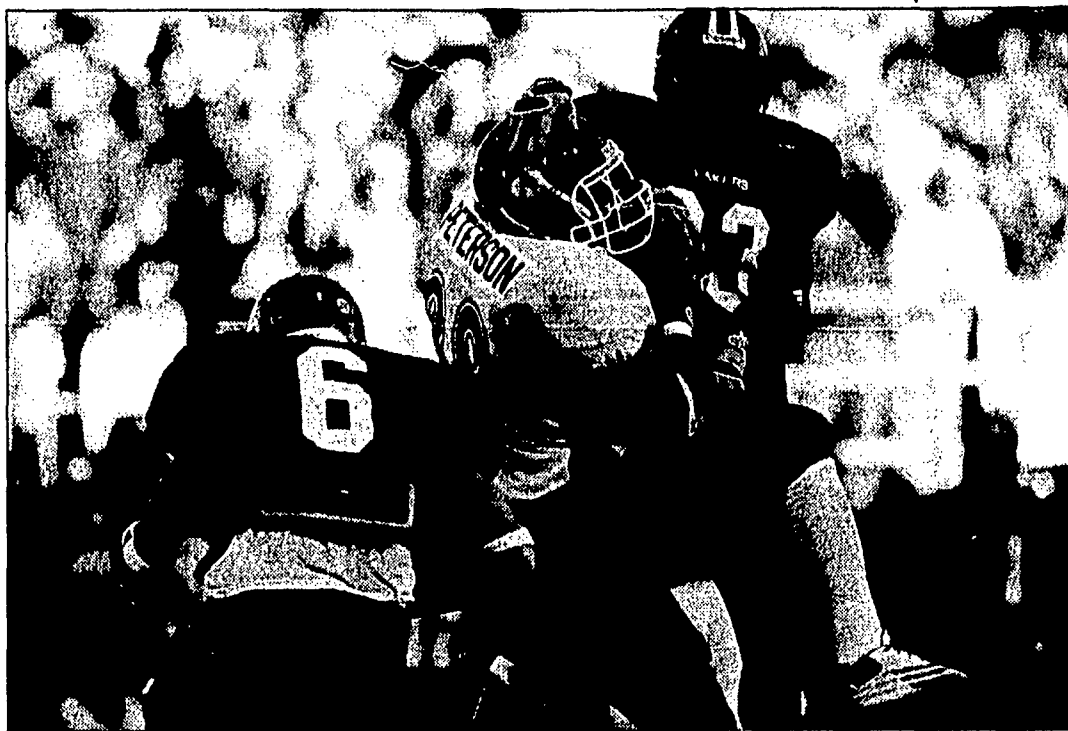
"It was pretty unbelievable to think that I was doing all of this in such a big game," Peterson said. "Some of my routes just kept coming open so we made the most of it."

Peterson's day got started off on the right foot when he pulled in a 30-yard touchdown pass on the game's opening drive.

The drive—and Peterson's catch—set the tone for Northwest's offense throughout the first half.

While that play opened up the scoring for Northwest, perhaps Peterson's biggest play came in the waning minutes of the third quarter.

Faced with a third-down conversion, quarterback Josh Lamberson found Peterson for



**MIKE PETERSON** catches a pass in double coverage in between Laker defenders Samad Cain and Joe Ballard. Peterson broke four tackles while driving to score on the opening drive.

what appeared to be a 10-yard completion.

That was when Peterson decided to put in a little bit of manual labor.

After breaking one tackle, the tight end raced down the sidelines, hurdling one defender before getting in a foot race.

"I sorta ran out of gas on that one," Peterson joked after the game.

The play put the Bearcats on the 11-yard line and led to a field goal.

While the reception itself swung the momentum of the then tied game towards Northwest, the play stands as a microcosm of Peterson's career.

Three years ago, Peterson was in the working world, seeing his only football action in the occasional intramural football game.

Saturday, he spent the

better part of the afternoon securing his spot in Northwest folklore.

While his biggest game didn't end in a win, his biggest game and biggest plays couldn't have come at a bigger time.

Don't expect Peterson to take any credit for his game.

"I know we didn't win," he said. "But I couldn't be prouder of the rest of the guys on our team. We came out and played our absolute best. To see what we went through as a team, to finish at this stage was pretty good."

Lamberson said it was easy to see Peterson could play a big role in the 'Cats final game of the year after watching film.

"Their linebackers sorta shelled out," he said. "We saw that and knew we would be able to find (Peterson) open in the middle."

## Not a bad day's work

Mike Peterson kept a streak alive that started against Angelo State.

In each of the Bearcats five playoff games, Northwest had at least one receiver who hauled in 100 yards.

Nine receptions also marked a career high for Peterson.

As the tight end looked out among the sea of people who had gathered outside the locker room, Peterson looked for his family. Perhaps his biggest fans, they were the ones who pushed him to walk-on at Northwest.

Now Peterson, with his water jug in hand, stepped out to the group of fans, ready to face another season, hopefully with an even bigger reward.

# Good teams, players make up title teams

Three players stood on the sidelines during the Division II National Championship game.

Individually, East Stroudsburg's Jimmy Terwilliger, South Dakota's Wes Beschoner and Bloomsburg's Jamar Brittingham were all honored the night before as the top three individual players in Division II.

All three had memorable seasons, but none of them made it to the final game, Terwilliger coming the closest when his squad was throttled by Grand Valley State one game away from Florence.

You see, good teams play in the national title game. Good individuals watch from the sidelines.

When the final horn sounded Saturday, a good team was wearing white uniforms.

During a memorable march in the playoffs, 53 players had molded into one unit.

Following the game, apparently the team immediately turned back to 53 individuals.

Obviously the game ended in a flurry of emotions, but for any player to be called out by his teammates on the sidelines is uncalled for.

Unfortunately Saturday night, individual frustration drew much of the attention away from an amazing season.

## Out of Bounds



Cole Young  
Editor in Chief

Perhaps more importantly than winning together, a team has to know how to lose together.

Obviously losing a game of that magnitude is tough. Losing in a title game is something that Northwest had never experienced before.

Northwest knows a thing or two about ending other team's seasons. They have had the duty of ending four different team's seasons in the playoffs.

Each time a wide range of emotions poured out from opposite sidelines.

Four of the five weeks in the playoffs the feeling of pure joy and ecstasy ran wild on the Northwest sideline. Saturday night those feelings couldn't have been more distant.

Tears of sadness marked the end of an improbable run that led the Bearcats who were left for dead in late October, to the national championship.

"I know it is hard right now," Northwest coach Me Tjeerdsmas said following the game. "But the sun is still going to come up in the morning, and it will hurt a little less."

Those are some wise words and hopefully after the buzz of playing in national title game has worn off, players and fans can look back and see the greatness this team achieved despite not winning the grand prize.

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# Coaches and players highlight postseason run for Bearcats

I'm a measly 117 pounds, stand at 5'9" (maybe) and just recently I was told I look 12-years-old.

So as you can imagine I'm not the most athletic guy in the world. Heck, most of the time the wind blows me over.

But I love sports, maybe I don't look like a sports freak but I just get lost in them. That's why it has just been a joy to cover the 2005 Northwest football team.

This team, especially their coach, has taught me one valuable lesson—never give up.

I'll admit I was one of the first individuals to give up on this team. Even from day one I didn't think they had what it took to get to the national championship. But I was quick to learn that sometimes you don't need the biggest names to win it all—you just need to have the biggest hearts.

After the massacre at Arrowhead, I started off my game story like this: "Northwest's season might be over as quickly as Saturday's game was at Arrowhead Stadium ... the Bearcats would be kissing the playoffs goodbye."

This just in: I was dead wrong. The last few weeks have been something that I will never forget and I too echo the comments made by many of the players—I enjoyed the road trips.

There's just something about getting away from the regular routine and I think it brought out the best in this team.

The other thing evident on this team was the quality of leadership. The four senior captains battled through a season they will never forget.

"It has been an unbelievable season, it really has," quarterback Josh Lamberson said after his final game as a Bearcat. "I don't think

## Jerome's Jabber



Jerome Boettcher  
Sports Editor

you could have picked a group of guys or coaches you would rather have in your corner. We talked about being in bad situations and having horrible things happen to you on and off the field, but this team just always bounced back.

"We always had somebody step up and take the reigns and say 'You know what, this isn't going to beat us, this isn't going to get us down.'"

As everyone that had the privilege of watching this team knows the real secret for the team's success

was coaching.

From the trainers to the graduate assistants to the head coach this team had excellent leaders who knew when to joke around and when to be serious.

During last weekend's amazing trip, another member of the media put it best when she said, "I wish coach Mel Tjeerdsma was my grandfather."

I couldn't have asked for a better coach to deal with. He was witty, he knew when to put the media in their place and he knew how to guide 53 young players into men.

Though this team didn't capture the ultimate goal I think everyone involved in this amazing experience will never forget the season of 2005.

"That's the way the game is, that's they way life is, sometimes things don't break your way," Tjeerdsma said. "I think the true test of anything like that is how you respond to it ... life is going to go on."

So to coach Tjeerdsma and all of the players of probably the best "never-say-die" team I have seen, I say thank you for allowing this tiny five foot nothing, hundred pound nothing tag along for the ride.

# Season's memories will last

## Team earns respect despite emotional loss

As the game began to tick away and the final seconds counted down on the scoreboard in Florence, Ala., a strange empty feeling came over me. I think that most people who were there felt it. It's that empty feeling that comes from knowing that something is ending.

I got the same feeling when I left high school, when I gave up playing sports and the day that my grandmother died. It's the feeling that something good has just been drawn to an abrupt stop.

I watched as quarterback Josh Lamberson scrambled from defensive pressure and frantically searched for a target in the end zone. Then there he was standing all alone in the corner of the end zone like a beacon guiding a lost soul back home. The hero from last week stood alone waiting for the ball. Lamberson saw him and launched the ball through the heavens towards Raphael Robinson. Unfortunately for the Bearcats fate had other plans. Lamberson's throw fell short and forced Robinson out of the end zone to make the catch.

You could tell that Robinson didn't want to go down. He didn't want the season to end with the ball in his hands, four yards shy of the end zone, but the weight of three defenders was just too much and in that split instant before the red shirt freshman hit the ground I saw a young man's heart break.

Robinson hit the ground

and Grand Valley State fans rushed the field. Robinson lied there four yards short of a fairy tale unmov- ing, with tears flowing from his eyes. Teammate E.J. Falkner ran over and collapsed next to him, the replay of a dropped pass running through his mind. The scene was a far cry from the celebration Robinson and his teammates took part in the week before after he snagged the game-winning pass in the back of the end zone.

I stood there on the side- line and stared at the story unfolding before me, as cameras exploded all around capturing the moment that some will never forget. I found myself unable to move. I watched these two young men and the pain that was displayed on their faces. Each one felt as though they could have won the game for their team.

At that instant I was angry at the world, at the way things had happened, at the way that people criticize each other. Saturday night in Flor- ence two men lied at the end of a football field hurting more than some ever hurt. Why?

They lost a game. It was a game that many teams never make it to. A game that Northwest wasn't even supposed to be in and yet they felt like they let every- one down.

I began to wonder why in a world filled with so much heartache, hurt and pain we care so much about a game. What really matters?

Life is a game and some-

## Off the hook



Brendan Kelley  
Asst. Sports Editor

times things don't follow the path that we want them to, sometimes we find ourselves miles from where we thought we would end up and some- times we watch as our dreams shat- ter in front of our own eyes, just four yards out of reach.

Northwest lost a football game on Saturday. It was for the national championship. A lot of people were watch- ing. Losing hurt really bad, it left pain and scars that some will never forget. Lamberson played his last game as a Bearcat. Falkner dropped a ball. Robinson fell just shy of achieving greatness a second time. None of them should feel any disappointment.

In a small Missouri town a young quarterback is prac- ticing scrambling out of the pocket and completing passes just like he saw Lam- berson do in a playoff game against Washburn. At a high school in Kansas a football player is conditioning hard, preparing for the upcoming track season. He's dreaming of becoming a two-sport star like Falkner. Somewhere on the other side of the United States a little boy is picking up a football and throwing it in the air dreaming about making a catch in the back of the end zone to win a big game, just like he saw some guy named Robinson do on Sportscenter a couple of weeks ago.

Some dreams end before we can fully accomplish them, but because of those who are strong enough to pursue dreams and push through adversity the rest of us have a reason to believe.

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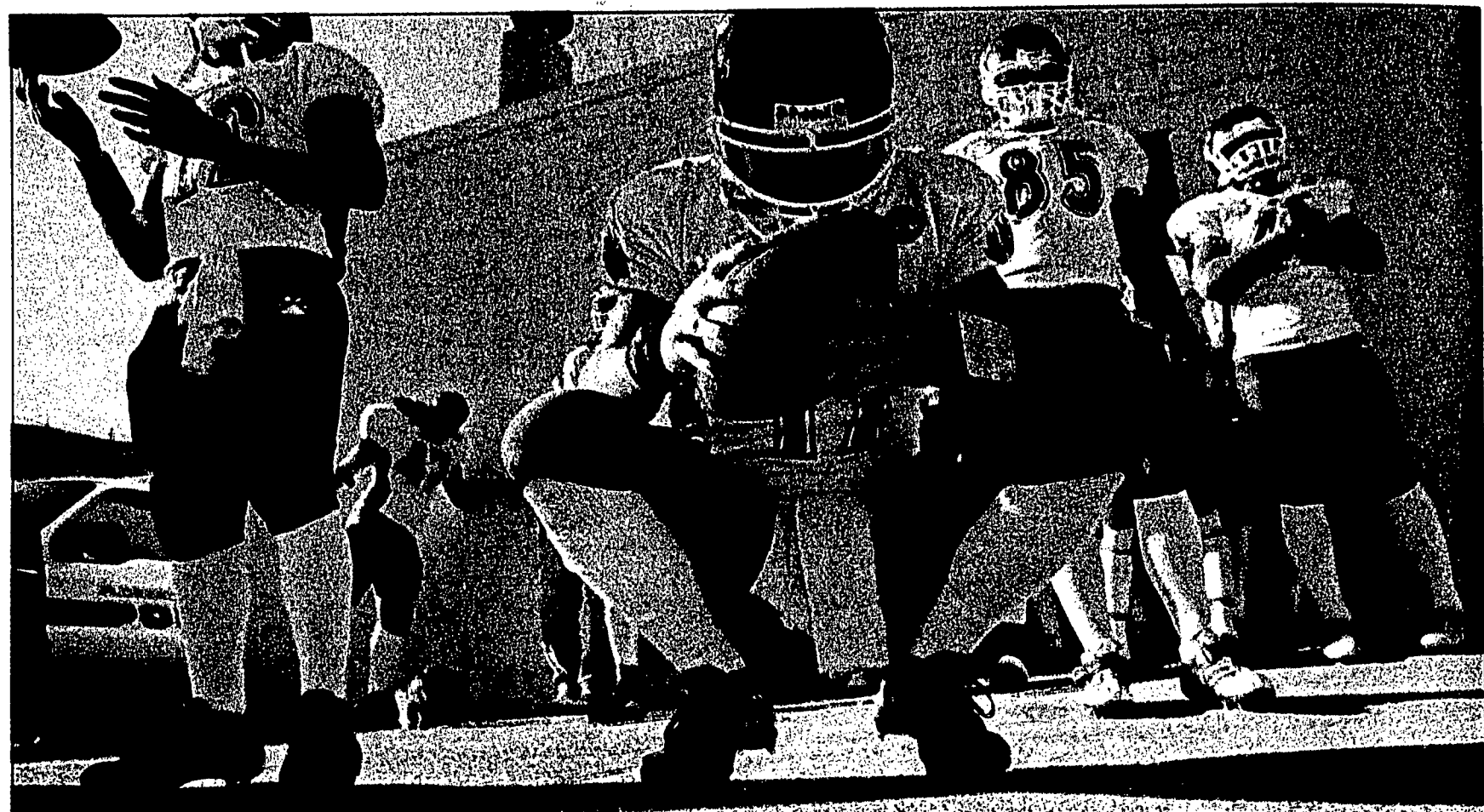
# P R E L U D E to a kickoff

Photos by Mike Dye



**TYLER MARTIN** lowers his head before the start of the championship game Saturday.

**FOCUSING ON** the biggest game of his career, Josh Lamberson sits by himself mentally preparing. Lamberson passed for a record 33 completions on 49 attempts.



**JOSH MATHEWS** mentally prepares for the National Championship Saturday afternoon in Florence, Ala. Mathews was about to take the field during special teams warmups, nearly an hour before kickoff.

# CONGRATULATIONS



## ON A FANTASTIC 2005 FOOTBALL SEASON!



**FROM YOUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS AT  
NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY.**